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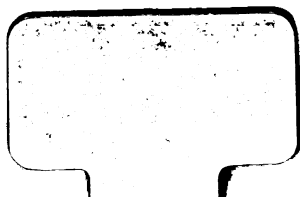
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ST. PAUL ON THE APPIAN WAY.

A Seatonian Poem.

George Adams Lamb
8^o. 58.

BY THE

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ST. PAUL ON THE APPIAN WAY.

WHO hath not read, or tried to read, beneath
His outer lineaments, the heart of one
Strong in fixed purpose, and of constant mind,
Whom neither fear can shake, nor the false voice
Of siren ease lure from his thorn-strewn way?

Aye, when the grace of form and comeliness
Charms with a weakened spell, the spirit loves
To mark that inner beauty of the soul
Which writes its characters on rugged brows,
Or in the lines of suffering, or of death.

Therefore 'tis sweet, soldier of God, 'tis sweet
With thee, O brave Apostle, for awhile
To linger by the way, and, as thy path

Leads ever onward to the sword and wreath,
The sword of pain, the unfading wreath of joy,
To muse o'er all thy heart, and mark thy brow,
In fancy, kindling, and thy features swept
By the swift-gathering winds that stir thy soul.

'Tis strange to one whom perils on the deep,
Through many a weary day and starless night,
With pitiless force have buffeted amain,
Once more to sail o'er calmest tracts of blue,
And, swayed on gentlest undulations, yield
To rapture of repose the o'er-worn frame:
And stranger still to mark how all the scene,
Deformed by tempests, or in storm-clouds wrapt,—
Threat'ning with giant shapes amid the gloom,—
Puts off its terrors, and at once shine forth
Headland, and cape, and vine-clad height, and woods
That toss their arms of welcome, beck'ning on
To the fair haven where he fain would be.

And yet the tumult of the winds and waves,
The cruel wrath of tempests, and the teeth
Of rocky ledges, where the white foam seethes,
Are gentler oft than they who wait on shore:—
They tell a truer tale than whisp'ring woods,
And sunny skies: The fierceness of man's wrath,
And superstitious hate, eager for blood,
House 'mid the fairest haunts, for their abode
Lies deep within the heart. Though earth and heaven

Murmur of peace, man's spirit mars the strain,
And dissonant passion breaks their harmony.

Methinks he knew, methinks he felt the power
Of voices saying,—'Peace is not for thee:
Not yet 'tis thine,—the sweet tranquillity
Meet for the toil-worn;—O, not thine the home
Due to affection, and sweet hours of love;—
But rather, battling with the foes of Christ,
And loneliness, and anguish of the heart
For friends grown cold, forsaking their first love,
And cruelty, and chains, and bitter death.'

And yet, 'tis when the tempest loudest beats,
'Tis when the weaker fail for fear, that they,
God's chosen spirits, gird their loins anew,
And arm them for the conflict;—on their eyes
Shines down the star of love from Him they serve,
And in their ears one voice of stirring might
Rings, crying, 'Be thou faithful unto death.'

Therefore, if calmer seas and clearer skies,
And airs soft-breathing, lent their gentle power
To soothe awhile the troubles of the past,
He yielded not to nerveless rest, nor asked
Ought save such respite as should lend him might
To strive unto the end, and, striving, die.

Ah! passing sweet the touch of brethren's hands,

And passing sweet the bent and gentle mood
Of the stern soldier. Honour to thy name,
Good Julius! Be thy kindly courtesies
Writ ever in the book of God's remembrance.

And now farewell the sea! Farewell the thought
Of rough barbarians, melted by the sight
Of innocence, unharmed by deadliest fangs,
And shielded by the present aid of God.
Farewell! Except that in the voice of prayer,
And in the visions of an eager soul,
Forth-reaching to the future, ye shall dwell
As those on whom ere long the light shall shine,
By Apostolic benediction drawn
From its High source to gild your darkened way.

Farewell to Capuan halls, and Vesvian slopes
Hiding the secret of their fiery heart.
Lo, how the fabled streams, o'erhung by wands
Of willows, silvered by first breaths of spring,
Steal down into the valleys; past the home
Of the fierce Arpinate; and Formiæ now
Spreads a long curve to meet the ocean's kiss;
And now again vine-tendrils clasp the stones,
The valley deepens, and the gleaming crown
Of Anxur whitens on its dazzling steep.

Once more the voice of comfort, and once more,
Heart-stirring tones of sympathy and love.

O, though the voice of nature be right sweet,
Though all her thousand notes and myriad hues
Weave such a chain of harmony and grace,
To cheer the heart, and lift the drooping soul
With heav'nly utterances, there are hours
When nothing save the voice of man can thrill,
And nought beside the words of love can heal,
And nought save sympathy of man bring strength.

And if, perchance, among that little band
Shone forth a well-known face, or friendly clasp
Recalled the touch of other days, and told,
With deeper pressure, gratitude of some
For gifts beyond the price of rarest gems,
What tongue may tell, what heart may know the power
A glance or touch might render in that day?

Yes! thank thy God, brave spirit, thank thy God!
And in the thanking breathe the breath of strength!
Take all thine armour, for before thee soon
Shall spread the mighty city, Queen of worlds,
Crowned with the spoils of nations, yet ah me!
Slave to herself, worst tyrant, heaviest chain.

Methinks he notes not now the face of things:
What boots it?—when the thronging multitudes,
Dense and more dense, about his pathway grow.
What boots it?—for the past is now the past—
The glories, and the tyrannies, and crimes,

That shed a momentary lustre down,
Or cast a baleful light on haughty Rome,
All, all are numbered with the things that were.
Aye! but in all that living host there dwells
The spirit of their fathers: lust, and pride,
And cruelty, and shameful scorn of weakness;—
These are the foes of him who bears the name
Of Christ,—and most the foes of whom they sway.

Therefore the soul of him of Tarsus went
Forth on the wings of time, and strove to grasp
A distant day, when all the altered earth,
Shadowed by peace, and 'neath the tranquil reign
Of a new faith, should not alone be fair,
But harbour loving hearts, and spirits pure.

And yet,—‘O Lord how long!’ The sadd’ning thought
Perforce came back;—for clearly might be read
That many a stubborn soul, and angry mind,
And many a spirit by superstition chained,
Lurked 'neath the front of those who came to gaze,
Or gazed in idle vacancy: 'tis hard
For one whose heart beats high with love to note
Hatred, or scorn, or pitiful contempt;
'Tis hard to seek an answer, finding none,
But finding cold repulse, or unbelief,
And obstinate rejection.—On the heights
That look upon Jerusalem had stood
The Son of God made man: and in His eyes

Gathered the unwonted dews, as, like a scroll
Inscribed with words of flame, the bitter tale
Of sin, and sorrow, and a nation's doom,
Unrolled itself before Him; and He cried,
'If thou hadst known, at least in this thy day,
The things belonging to thy peace!' I deem
That he who on the Appian way looked forth
O'er Rome's great city and its thronging hosts,
Albeit from him uncertainty's dark veil
Shrouded the truth, forbore not sigh or tear,
Wrung by sad auguries of bitter thought.

A soldier kindling at the trumpet's note,
A warrior arming for his latest field,
A conqueror laurel-crowned with dying breath,—
These be the themes that men are wont to love;
These be the themes on which the fabled Muse,—
Fabled, yet living in the unseen breeze
That sways the movements of creative power,—
Delights to crown with immortality.

'Tis well: There needs a more ærial flight,
A deeper rapture, and a purer heart,
To sing the nobler courage, and to hymn
The higher victories of heart and soul.

Therefore whate'er is sung is sung amiss,
Or sung unworthily. Awhile, perchance,
The glory of endurance, and the free

Strong voice of him whom chains could not enslave
Cry in us for the meed of praise, but ah!
The pencil fails in an unequal hand,
And we must silently admire: and yet,
As one who, musing on the portraiture
Of some sweet picture, excellently fair,
Comes ever back again, and, gazing long,
Seemeth to draw into his soul the lines
Of majesty or beauty, till they rest,
Part of himself, engraven on his heart;—
And he too dreams that he may give them life;—
So one that loves the Apostle's voice, and loves
To tread in his unswerving path, is held
Oft by a longing to withdraw the veil
That hides him from the unthinking world, to say
'Lo, here he stood,' 'Lo, here he wept,' 'Lo, here
He felt the spell of sympathy, and here,
As the huge city spread before his eyes,
Albeit he knew the sword was sharp, and knew
The bitterness of bondage to the free,
E'en like his Lord he set his face, and drew
All steadfastly unto the destined end.'

And, lo, the stones are hallowed by his tread,
The martyr's pathway is of nobler name
Than path of any triumph, and the slave
Of Jesus Christ is most divinely free.

